

TRIBUTE TO ROY WILKINS IN  
CELEBRATION OF BLACK HIS-  
TORY MONTH

**HON. MARTIN OLAV SABO**

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 9, 1999*

Mr. SABO. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to take part in the celebration of Black History Month this year by recognizing a distinguished civil rights leader from the state of Minnesota—Mr. Roy Wilkins, who led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from 1955 to 1977.

Roy Wilkins was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901, but he grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota—raised by an aunt after his mother died when Wilkins was only four years old. He attended Whittier Grade School and graduated from the Mechanic Arts High School. Wilkins attended the University of Minnesota, and graduated from the University in 1923.

After serving as editor of the University of Minnesota's newspaper, the Minnesota Daily, Wilkins started his professional career in Kansas City, where he served as managing editor of the Kansas City Call, an African-American newspaper. He used his role on the newspaper staff to encourage fellow blacks to vote and take advantage of the opportunity to make their political concerns known.

Upon joining the NAACP in 1931, Wilkins set to work identifying and correcting examples of racial injustice. He investigated working conditions for blacks on Mississippi levees, targeting those cases in which blacks were unfairly treated like slaves.

As the years passed, the fruits of Wilkins' labors as a civil rights advocate grew more obvious, and now he is widely recognized as the "Father of Civil Rights." Perhaps his greatest victory in the NAACP included the United States Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, which overturned the "separate-but-equal" doctrine in the South's educational system. Furthermore, Wilkins is extensively credited for his role in helping to pass the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, as well as the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

To recognize Wilkins' pivotal achievements, President Lyndon Johnson presented him with the country's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, in 1967.

Roy Wilkins served the NAACP for a total of 46 years. Although Wilkins passed away in 1981, his legacy lives on in an extraordinary piece of public artwork in St. Paul, Minnesota—the Roy Wilkins Memorial.

The Roy Wilkins Memorial was unveiled in 1995 on the Capitol Mall of the Minnesota State Capitol. The Memorial, with its intriguing symbolic features, serves as a fine reminder of the life and work of this revered man. The walls of the monument signify the obstacles and barriers created by racial segregation, while the spiral shape of the sculpture represents the cycle of Wilkins' achievements in the form of advancements for minority rights. This spiral extends above and through the walls of the monument to illustrate how racial equality can be met by means of effective legislative actions. Finally, the Memorial's obelisk,

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decorated with African relics, is a moving tribute to the ancestors of modern-day African Americans.

Mr. Speaker, today I challenge my colleagues—and all Americans—to become active participants in Black History Month and all that it represents. I encourage them to learn more about Roy Wilkins, and, if possible, to visit the Roy Wilkins Memorial in Minnesota and see this fine monument for themselves. This is just one example of the many ways we all can recognize, explore and honor the civil rights leaders who guided our nation toward racial equality and understanding.

1999—A CRITICAL YEAR FOR  
BELARUS

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 9, 1999*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, last month, a Congress of Democratic Forces was held in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. The Congress demonstrated the resolve of the growing democratic opposition to authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the determination by the opposition to have free, democratic elections consistent with the legitimate 1994 constitution. Earlier last month, on January 10, members of the legitimate Belarusian parliament, disbanded by Lukashenka after the illegal 1996 constitutional referendum which extended his term of office by two years to 2001, set a date for the next presidential elections for May 16. According to the 1994 constitution, Lukashenka's term expires in July. Not surprisingly, Lukashenka rejects calls for a presidential election.

Local elections are currently being planned for April, although many of the opposition plan not to participate, arguing that elections should be held only under free, fair and transparent conditions, which do not exist at the present time. Indeed, the law on local elections leaves much to be desired and does not provide for a genuinely free and fair electoral process. The local elections and opposition efforts to hold presidential elections must be viewed against the backdrop of a deteriorating economic situation. One of the resolutions adopted by the Congress of Democratic Forces accuses Lukashenka of driving the country to "social tensions, international isolation and poverty." As an example of the heightening tensions, just last weekend, Andrei Sannikov, the former deputy minister of Belarus and a leader of the Charter '97 human rights group, was brutally assaulted by members of a Russian-based ultranationalist organization. Additionally, Lukashenka's moves to unite with Russia pose a threat to Belarus' very sovereignty. Thus, Mr. Speaker, this year promises to be a critical year for Belarus.

Recently, a staff delegation of the (Helsinki) Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which I chair, traveled to Belarus, raising human rights concerns with high-ranking officials, and meeting with leading members of the opposition, independent media and nongovernmental organizations.

The staff report concludes that the Belarusian Government continues to violate its

commitments under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and that at the root of these violations lies the excessive power usurped by President Lukashenka since his election in 1994, especially following the illegitimate 1996 referendum. Although one can point to some limited areas of improvement, such as allowing some opposition demonstrations to occur relatively unhindered, overall OSCE compliance has not improved since the deployment of the OSCE's Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) almost one year ago. Freedoms of expression, association and assembly remain curtailed. The government hampers freedom of the media by tightly controlling the use of national TV and radio. Administrative and economic measures are used to cripple the independent media and NGOs. The political opposition has been targeted for repression, including imprisonment, detention, fines and harassment. The independence of the judiciary has been further eroded, and the President alone controls judicial appointments. Legislative power is decidedly concentrated in the executive branch of government.

The Commission staff report makes a number of recommendations, which I would like to share with my colleagues. The United States and OSCE community should continue to call upon the Belarusian Government to live up to its OSCE commitments and, in an effort to reduce the climate of fear which has developed in Belarus, should specifically encourage the Belarusian Government, *inter alia*, to: (1) Immediately release Alyaksandr Shydlauskii (sentenced in 1997 to 18 months imprisonment for allegedly spray painting anti-Lukashenka graffiti) and review the cases of those detained and imprisoned on politically motivated charges, particularly Andrei Klymov and Vladimir Koudinov; (2) cease and desist the harassment of opposition activists, NGOs and the independent media and permit them to function; (3) allow the opposition access to the electronic media and restore the constitutional right of the Belarusian people to free and impartial information; (4) create the conditions for free and fair elections in 1999, including a provision in the election regulations allowing party representation on the central and local election committees; and (5) strengthen the rule of law, beginning with the allowance for an independent judiciary and bar.

With Lukashenka's term in office under the legitimate 1994 Constitution expiring in July 1999, the international community should make clear that the legitimacy of Lukashenka's presidency will be undermined unless free and fair elections are held by July 21. The United States and the international community, specifically the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, should continue to recognize only the legitimate parliament—the 13th Supreme Soviet—abolished by Lukashenka in 1996, and not the post-referendum, Lukashenka-installed, National Assembly. At the time, the United States—and our European allies and partners—denounced the 1996 referendum as illegitimate and extra-constitutional. The West needs to stand firm on this point, as the 13th Supreme Soviet and the 1994 Constitution are the only legal authorities.

The democratically oriented opposition and NGOs deserve continued and enhanced moral and material assistance from the West. The United States must make support for those committed to genuine democracy a high priority in our civic development and NGO assistance. I applaud and want to encourage such entities as USIS, the Eurasia Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, International Republican Institute, ABA/CEELI and others in their efforts to encourage the development of a democratic political system, free market economy and the rule of law in Belarus.

The United States and the international community should strongly encourage President Lukashenka and the 13th Supreme Soviet to begin a dialogue which could lead to a resolution of the current constitutional crisis and the holding of democratic elections. The

OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) could be a vehicle for facilitating such dialogue.

The Belarusian Government should be encouraged in the strongest possible terms to cooperate with the OSCE AMG. There is a growing perception both within and outside Belarus that the Belarusian Government is disingenuous in its interaction with the AMG. The AMG has been working to promote these important objectives: an active dialogue between the government, the opposition and NGOs; free and fair elections, including a new election law that would provide for political party representation on electoral committees and domestic observers; unhindered opposition access to the state electronic media; a better functioning, independent court system and sound training of judges; and the examination

and resolution of cases of politically motivated repression.

Mr. Speaker, there is a growing divide between the government and opposition in Belarus—thanks to President Lukashenka's authoritarian practices, a divide that could produce unanticipated consequences. An already tense political situation is becoming increasingly more so. Furthermore, Lukashenka's efforts at political and economic integration with Russia could have serious potential consequences for neighboring states, especially Ukraine. Therefore, it is vital for the United States and the OSCE to continue to speak out in defense of human rights in Belarus, to promote free and democratic elections this year, and to encourage meaningful dialogue between the government and opposition.